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WILLIAM LICHFIELD AND HIS *COMPLAINT OF GOD*

Mr. E. Borgström, in *Anglia*, xxxiv, 508 ff., prints *The Complaint of God to Sinful Man, and the Answer of Man*, by William Lichfield, from ms. Gonville and Caius Coll. 174. This, he says, is the first time the poem has been printed; in this statement, however, he is mistaken, for it is the same poem, with some omissions, transpositions, and variant readings in single lines, as that printed by Dr. Furnivall in *Political, Religious, and Love Poems* (E. E. T. S., revised edition, 1903), pp. 198 ff., from mss. Lambeth 306 and 853, under the titles *The Complaynt of Criste* and *Christ's Own Complaint*, respectively. The chief variations between the version in *Anglia* and that from ms. Lambeth 853—which is a better text than the one in ms. 306—are given below:

The following lines in *Lam.* are not in *Ang.*: 453-85; 493-501; 509-17; 589-97; 613-21; 637-45; 749-67—a total of ninety lines.

The following lines are in different order: *Lam.* 485-93 = *Ang.* 521-9; *Lam.* 501-9 = *Ang.* 513-21; *Lam.* 645-61 = *Ang.* 401-17; *Lam.* 661-77 = *Ang.* 465-81; *Lam.* 677-85 = *Ang.* 529-37.

Besides these, there are frequent variations in phraseology, and in some stanzas a substitution of an entire line or two.

In ms. Lambeth 306 a short poem has been prefixed to this *Complaint*, and written as part of it; they are in reality separate works.¹ The same short poem is also in ms. Lambeth 853, but is not connected with the longer *Complaint*: the former ends on fol. 88, and the latter begins on fol. 193. Dr. Furnivall, however, prints the two with a continuous numbering of the lines as if they were one poem. The poem in which we are interested—the one by Lichfield—begins with l. 133, on p. 199 (from ms. 853), and l. 137, p. 198 (from ms. 306). (All references are to the revised edition of 1903.)

According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* there are two poems by Lichfield in Gonville and Caius College ms. 174, entitled respectively *The Complaynt of God to Sinful Man and the Answer of Man*, and *A Dialogue of the Passion between God and the Penitent Soul*. Mr. Borgström corrects this statement: this

¹ See the E. E. T. S. edition, pp. 198 and xix.

second poem is a part of the *Complaint* which was left out at the proper place and then written in at the end with an indication of the place where it belonged.²

Neither Dr. Furnivall nor Mr. Borgström has noted that this *Complaint* is also found in MS. Camb. Ff. II, 38, from which an extract is printed in *Percy Society Publications*, XIV, 87. As this extract corresponds closely to Christ's tenth complaint and Man's tenth answer in MS. Lambeth 853 (ll. 645-709), it is probable that the versions in these two manuscripts are practically the same.

Warton is authority for the statement that there was a copy of the *Complaint* in a folio manuscript in the possession of Henry Huth.³

"Complaints" of Christ were a popular theme in medieval literature.⁴ Some, like Lichfield's poem, were in the form of a dialogue between God or Christ, and Man; others were monologues. For examples of the dialogue form see *Cursor Mundi*, ll. 17, 111 ff.; poems of Jakob Ryman, in Herrig's *Archiv*, LXXXIX, 264; and a poem from the Fairfax Manuscript, *ibid.* CVI, 63. A *Dialogus inter Deum et Peccatorem* is among the works of Innocent III, but this seems not to have influenced the "Complaints": it is too scholastic in tone to be suitable for poetic purposes.⁵

The information hitherto gathered concerning the life of Lichfield, as given in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, may be briefly stated:

He was a doctor of divinity—of Oxford, according to Wood and Pits; of Cambridge, according to Gascoigne. He was rector of the church of All Hallows the Great, Thames Street, London; and was one of the most famous preachers of his time. In addition to the *Complaint*, he left "no fewer than 3083 sermons written in English with his own hand," besides a collection of materials for sermons, entitled *Mille Exempla*. He died October 24, 1448, and was buried under the communion table of his church.

The above-mentioned conflicting claims for Oxford and Cambridge as Lichfield's university seem to be due to a confusion of this William Lichfield with a younger man of the same name, who

² *Anglia*, XXXIV, 498.

³ T. Warton, *History of English Poetry*, III, 95.

⁴ See the article by Professor Cook in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, VII, 268; and a note in his edition of Cynewulf's *Christ*, p. 207.

⁵ Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, CCXVII, 691.

was probably a graduate of Oxford, was pastor of All Hallows in the Wall, London (not All Hallows the Great), and later Chancellor of St. Paul's, and who died about 1517.⁶ Gascoigne, who was Chancellor of the University of Oxford and a contemporary of Lichfield, was undoubtedly correct in assigning the latter to Cambridge.

I have found a few items which give a more complete idea of Lichfield's interests and activities. The *Dictionary of National Biography* says that the date of his appointment as rector of All Hallows the Great is unknown; Hennessy gives the date as 1425, without, however, citing any authority.⁷

According to Hennessy, again, Lichfield was rector of St. Mary Magdalene, Old Fish Street, London, as well as of All Hallows the Great.⁸ Here also he gives no authority. The *Victoria History of London* accepts Hennessy's statement.⁹ If this is true Lichfield was a pluralist, and thus a participator in a practice which was a source of constant trouble and frequent complaints in the fifteenth century. Such an attitude is contrary to what we should expect from Lichfield's position on other church matters. Moreover, an entry in the *Patent Rolls* for April 24, 1448, names John Carpenter as the rector of St. Mary Magdalene.¹⁰ In Hennessy's list of rectors John Carpenter's term is given as from 1415 to 1441. Then follows Lichfield, from 1441 to 1448. It would seem, then, that Hennessy is wrong in including Lichfield among the rectors of this church.

In 1446 Sir John Fray, chief baron of the exchequer, William Lichfield, and Gilbert Worthington, clerks, were selected as arbiters in a dispute over a rectory between Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and the prior and convent of Barnwell.¹¹

Lichfield is named in a list of benefactors of Queen's College, Cambridge.¹²

⁶ Wood, *Fasti Oxonienses*, I, 7; and G. Hennessy, *Novum Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense*, pp. xxiii and 82.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. lix and 310

⁹ *Victoria History of the Counties of England—London*, I, 228.

¹⁰ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1446-1452), p. 151.

¹¹ W. G. Searle, *The History of the Queen's College of St. Margaret and St. Bernard*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 1867 (Octavo Publications, v, 67).

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

On August 26, 1446, William Bingham, William Lichfield, William Millington, Gilbert Worthington, John Cote, and others, professors in sacred theology, were granted a license to found a new college, to be known as Godeshous (later called Christ's College), at Cambridge.¹³

On October 12, 1446, John Somerset, chancellor of the exchequer, William Lichfield, Reginald Pecock, and others were granted a license to found a gild in honor of the nine orders of holy angels, at New Braynford, Middlesex.¹⁴

In 1447, William Lichfield, Gilbert Worthington, John Cote, and John Neel, clergymen of London, petitioned Parliament that they be given permission to establish grammar schools in their respective parishes.¹⁵ New schools in charge of competent instructors were sorely needed, for the existing institutions were overcrowded and the teachers were often illiterate. The petition was granted, and the schools were established. Fosbroke declares that this marks the beginning of "Grammar-Schools, properly so called."¹⁶ One of the schools founded as the result of this petition later became the famous Mercers' School.

Gascoigne tells us that, in 1450 and before, members of the court complained to the king that certain preachers were inciting the people to insurrection by preaching against the corruption of the king's ministers, the injustice of the law courts, both civil and ecclesiastical, and other vices of the times. Among these preachers, says Gascoigne, were Gilbert Worthington, William Lichfield, and Peter of Beverly. In other words, these men were accused of stirring up the discontent which culminated in Jack Cade's rebellion and other popular uprisings in various parts of England. It appears, then, that Lichfield and other preachers openly attacked the vices of those in authority; but the accusation that they were responsible for the insurrection was, of course, only an attempt of

¹³ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1441-1446), p. 460; see also *ibid.* (1446-1452), p. 103. For an account of this projected foundation, see John Peile, *Christ's College*, pp. 1 ff.

¹⁴ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1446-1452), p. 29.

¹⁵ T. Brewer, *Memoir of the Life and Times of John Carpenter*, pp. 62 and 63; and B. B. Orridge, *Some Account of the Citizens of London and their Rulers*, p. 21.

¹⁶ T. D. Fosbroke, *Encyclopaedia of Antiquities*, I, 395, article on "Free Schools."

the corrupt ministers to shift upon others the blame for the consequences of their own misdeeds.¹⁷

Lichfield numbered among his friends a number of interesting men. He was a beneficiary to the extent of twenty shillings in the will of John Carpenter, the author of the *Liber Albus* and for many years clerk of London; and he and Reginald Pecock were selected by Carpenter to carry out one of the provisions of the will.¹⁸ Lichfield and Pecock were again associated, in 1446, in the founding of the gild at New Braynford (see above). It appears, then, that at this time the two men were friends. Later, however, after Pecock's sermon at Paul's Cross and his writings had brought him into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities, Lichfield became one of his most active opponents.¹⁹ From the connection of Lichfield with John Somerset in the New Braynford foundation, we may also infer that he was on more or less intimate terms with this famous physician, mathematician, and grammarian, and chancellor of the exchequer. Associated with Lichfield in his various activities were also a number of well-known London preachers, among whom were Gilbert Worthington, rector of St. Andrew, Holborne; William Bingham, rector of St. John Zachary; John Cote, rector of St. Peter, Cornhill; and John Neel, rector of St. Mary Colechurch.

From the facts now available, we are able to form a fair estimate of Lichfield's character and activities. His ability as a poet is proved by his *Complaint*, which shows sincere religious feeling, and in technique is at least as good as the work of some of the better known fifteenth century writers. That he was an industrious maker of sermons is testified by the collection of 3,083 which he left at his death. As a preacher, he was a fearless opponent in the pulpit of the corrupt ministers of the king. He was "a good prechour and an holy man," says a contemporary chronicler in recording his death.²⁰ But the most prominent feature in the notices here collected is his interest in education. He was a bene-

¹⁷ J. E. T. Rogers, *Locii e Libro Veritatum*, pp. xlvi, liii, and liv; 188 ff.

¹⁸ T. Brewer, *op. cit.*, pp. 138 and 143. This John Carpenter is not the same man as the John Carpenter, mentioned above, rector of St. Mary Magdalene, who later became Bishop of Worcester.

¹⁹ J. E. T. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

²⁰ C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century*, p. 296.

factor of Queen's College, Cambridge, and was one of the trustees of the proposed new college of Godeshous at Cambridge. In addition, he was one of the founders of the four grammar schools in London which are said to mark the beginning of free grammar schools in England.

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THE 'DOLEFUL LAY OF CLORINDA'

In the collection of elegies in memory of Sir Philip Sidney, led off by Spenser's *Astrophel*, the second is ascribed by Spenser himself to 'Clorinda,' Sir Philip's sister, Mary, Countess of Pembroke,

Which least I marre the sweetness of the vearse,
In sort as she it sung I will rehearse.

All editors have accepted this ascription, as Spenser apparently intended that it should be accepted, until Mr. de Selincourt, in the one-volume Oxford *Spenser* (p. xxxv, n. 2), briefly and cautiously recorded his opinion that the 'Doleful Lay' is Spenser's own, chiefly because it is doubtful that Countess Mary could have achieved its "peculiarly Spenserian effects of rhythm and melody." In *Mod. Lang. Notes* for February, 1916 (xxxI, 79-82), Dr. Percy W. Long supports this opinion by showing the strong resemblance to Spenser's practice in the use of the colon after the second line of the stanza, by remarking that such ascription is common in Spenser's time and actually occurs in his *Ruins of Time*, and by pointing out a few resemblances in word and thought to Spenser's verse.

When preparations were begun for the *Spenser Concordance* in 1907, I did not include this text. A hasty examination led me to the conclusion that it was at best but a feeble imitation of Spenser, wanting altogether the vigor and fullness of tone even of *Astrophel*. As the work progressed and I grew more familiar with the Spenserian cadence, another examination might have reversed my opinion. Certainly had I taken the trouble to index the poem, the Spenserian authorship would, I believe, have been at once apparent. Almost every phrase, combination, and mannerism in it, not to say the little thought which it contains, is found elsewhere in Spenser,